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THE CELEBRATED  
**HANS HOLBEIN'S**


ALPHABET OF DEATH



PARIS  
PRINTED FOR EDWIN TROSS

Rue des Bons-Enfants, 28

M DCCG LVI



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THE CELEBRATED

# HANS HOLBEIN'S

## ALPHABET OF DEATH

ILLUSTRATED WITH OLD BORDERS ENGRAVED ON WOOD  
WITH LATIN SENTENCES AND ENGLISH QUATRAINS

selected by

ANATOLE DE MONTAIGLON



PARIS

PRINTED FOR EDWIN TROSS

28, Rue des Bons - Enfants




M DCCC LVI

TO  
THOMAS WRIGHT, ESQ., M.A., F.S.A.,

this edition of the Alphabet of Death


is respectfully dedicated



by  
the Editor.



The life and works of the great German painter, Hans Holbein, and the question of the Dance of Death are, for historical inquirers, an admirable subject, on which nothing has yet been said that can be held really satisfactory; but the limits of this note are necessarily so confined as to leave no space even for a view of them.

For the artist, it is only necessary to refer the reader to Sandrart, to the latin catalogue written by Charles Patin as an introduction to his edition of the *Encomium Moriæ*, to Fuessli, to Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, and to J. P. Mariette's remarks on this last work, recently printed in his *Abcdario*. It is said that M<sup>r</sup> Passavant has been many years occupied in collecting materials for a complete monography of Holbein; so that, as the attempt is worthy of him, and he is fit for the task, we may hope to have the long-wanted life and catalogue








executed in a superior manner. On the Dance of Death, several interesting books have been published, among which it is almost unnecessary to name those of Gabriel Peignot, Francis Douce, and Hyacinthe Langlois. Here we have only to speak of the Alphabet itself.

Engraved by Hans Lutzelburger, as now thought by the most competent critics, it was first used at Basle about the year 1530 by the famous printers Belbelius and Cratander, and we refer to Douce's remarks (p. 214-18) on the question for the titles of the books in which it was employed, and for the numerous copies and imitations made of it. We will only repeat with him that these initial letters, « in elegance of design and delicacy of engraving, have scarcely ever been equalled, and certainly never surpassed. They may in every point of view be regarded as the chef-d'œuvre of ancient block engraving. »

Seven years ago, in 1849, the whole series was anew elegantly copied on wood by Professor H. Lödel of Göttingen, and published in a little 8<sup>vo</sup> volume, with George Osterwald's lithographed borders, by I. M. Heberle at Cologne, Bonn and Brussels. Our new edition gives the same letters, real gems of engraving on wood, but, as a worthy illustration, accompanies them with the two Dances of Death, the one more Gothic in form, the other more coarsely engraved, but yet perhaps more artistical, which are








found in the well known Simon Vostre's *Horæ*. These two Dances, as well as the ornamental borders, all taken from different books, are engraved with a fidelity and elegance on which our readers may pronounce, by M<sup>r</sup> Leon Le Maire, of Paris, who has also copied on the title Holbein's Escutcheon of Death from the *Imagines Mortis*.

On these letters we will now add a curious remark, which, we believe, has not yet been made. In the eleven first letters we find the subjects in the traditional order without any relation between them. So we see, as in all the series, the Dance begun by the Death the musician, and followed, in order of rank, by the Pope, the Emperor, the King, the Cardinal, the Empress, the Bishop, the Nobleman, the Burgess or Merchant, and the Priest. But, from the letter M to the end, it may be remarked, and I owe this hint to M<sup>r</sup> Henry Bordier, that each letter is the beginning of the Latin name of the character represented.



So, at M we see the *Medicus*; at N the banker, *Numerarius*; at O a fat monk, *Obesus monachus*; at P a fighting soldier, *Præliator*. The Q is less clear; the obedient nun who quietly follows Death, might however be called in Latin : *Quieta*, *quassata*, or *queribunda monacha*. But the R is quite certain, for we find in it : *Ridens* or *ridiculus fatuus*. In the S we have the luxurious woman, *Scortum*. The T is





somewhat troublesome; yet in the minstrel driven to the ground and urged to drink by a facetious skeleton, we may read *Titubans homo*. At V the galloping horseman is perhaps *Velox homo*; at W the ancient hermit is *Wetustissimus homo*, the superlative being marked by the repetition of the same letter. At X we have deceitful gamesters, *Xycophantes*, and this change of S into X is not at all inadmissible, since in the subsequent letter the artist has used *Ynfans*, when the ordinary form is *infans*. As to Z, it is used like the Greek  $\Omega$  to import the idea of the end, and consequently the artist has put in it the last judgment, the end of this earthly world, as Z is the end of the Alphabet. Some of these interpretations may certainly be modified and improved, but we hold as undisputable the idea of seeking in the last thirteen letters the beginning of the Latin name of the intended characters.

One word more, and I close this note. A literary selector of Latin sentences on Death might be able to choose from Greek, Roman and old Christian authors, most magnificent extracts; but such a thing was quite impossible for us. Here we had to give twenty-four sentences, of a limited extent, each beginning by a different letter; and only long enough to surround and support the letter in conformity with typographical exigencies.—As to the quatrains, we might reprint the translation written in 1794 by








Hawkins for his edition of a copy of Holbein's *Imagines Mortis*; but we have chosen to have them made for the most part with the stanzas of the old translation of the Macabre's Dance by John Lydgate, and some new-written in the same style, so that each may be indicative of the subject in the letter. That is all that can be said on them.

A. DE M.

Paris, 12th July, 1856.





DEATH CAM DRYVYNG AFTER,  
AND AL TO DUSTE PASSHED,  
KYNGES AND KNYGHTES,  
KAYSERS AND POPES,  
LERED AND LEWED,  
HE LET NO MAN STONDE  
THAT HE HITTE EVENE,  
THAT EVERE STIRRED AFTER.  
MANYE A LOVELY LADY,  
AND LEMMANS OF KNYGHTES,  
SWOWNED AND SWELTED  
FOR SORWE OF HIS DYNTEs.

(PIERS PLOUGHMAN, Passus XX.)





PUD mortem non  
est acceptio per-  
sonarum. Nec mi-  
seretur pupillo,  
nec defert senio-

ri, nec timet potentem, nec vere-  
tur nobilem, nec horret pauperem  
aut ignobilem, nec dimittit divi-  
tem aut potentem, nec contemnit  
infirmem aut debilem, nec evitat  
fortem, nec parcit sapienti, nec  
insipienti.

S. ANTONINUS.

*O creatures, ye that ben resonable,  
Who alle shalle trace the daunce of Macabré,  
Ye may here lern doctrine ful notable,  
How dethe ne spareth high ne low degré.*

A 1

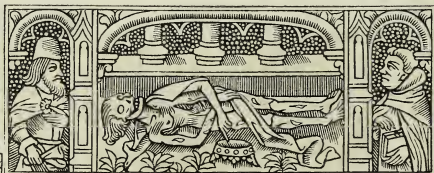




ONORUM MORS NON  
est nisi accele-  
ratio glorificatio-  
nis, diruptio car-  
ceris, finis pere-  
grinationis, portus navigationis,  
contritio laquei, depositio vetustæ  
vestis, induitio novæ, depositio  
ponderis, dejectio atrocissimi ho-  
stis, solutio debiti naturalis.

HUGO CARD.

*O thou that of alle estates spirituelle  
In erthe art set moste high in dignité  
Upon this daunce firste begynne thou shalle,  
As moste worthy by thy sovainté.*



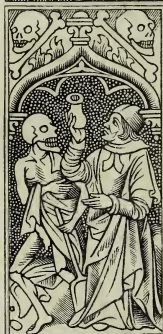


ERTUM est quod  
morieris, et in-  
certum quando  
aut quomodo aut  
ubi, quoniam u-

bique te mors expectat. Tu quo-  
que, si sapiens fueris, ubique eam  
expectabis.

S. BERNARDUS.

*Sir emperour, lorde of alle the grounde,  
soverayne prynce and hieste of noblesse,  
Ye moste forsake of golde your aple rounde,  
Sceptre and swerde, and alle your high  
[prowesse.*





IES iræ, dies illa,  
Crucis expandens  
[vexilla,  
Solvat seculum in  
[favilla.

Quantus tremor est futurus  
Quando iudex est venturus,  
Omnia stricte discussurus.

*O noble Kyng, most worthy of renoune,  
Come forthe anon for alle your worthinesse,  
That hadde somtyme about you envyrone  
Grete ryalté and passyng high noblesse.*





ST mors naturalis  
et pœnalis, natu-  
ralis per quam a-  
nima separatur a  
corpore, pœnalis

vero est cum anima e virtutis vita  
emoritur et vivit in vita vitii.

PHILO JUDÆUS.

*Ye ben abasshed, it semeth, and in drede,  
Syre cardynalle; me thynketh by your chere;  
But yit forthy ye folowe shale in dede.  
With othere folk, my daunce for to lere.*





INIS noster absconditus est nobis; venturi exitus ignorantia nobis incerta est; improvisus occursum, incertus eventus et finis omnium. Dum nescimus, repente mors venit; dum non æstimamus, improvisi tollimur; dum ignoramus, repente subtrahimur.

S. ISIDORUS HISPANUS.

*Ye han not lerned here afore to daunce  
No daunce in sothe of folyng so sage,  
Wherefor ye see by clere demonstraunce  
What pryde is worth, force, or high lynage.*

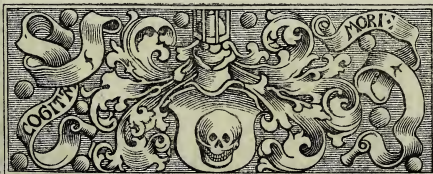




ERMANA corruptio-  
nis mors est, de-  
sperationis domi-  
na, incredulitatis  
mater, inferni pa-  
rens, diaboli conjunx, omnium  
malorum regina.

S. PETRUS CHRYSOLOGUS.

*Madame, in sothe, ther is non other bote;  
Dethe hath in erthe no lady ne maistresse;  
But on this daunce ye moste nedis fote,  
Al, be ye quene, countesse, or duchesse.*





ÆC paria sunt. Non  
eris, nec fuisti,  
utrumque tempus  
alienum est. In  
hoc punctum con-

jectus es : quod ut extendas, quous-  
que extendes? Quid fles? Quid  
optas? Perdis operam. Rata et fixa  
sunt, atque magna et æterna ne-  
cessitate ducuntur. Eo ibis quo  
omnia eunt.

SENECA.



*My lord, sir bisshope, ye maye not so  
[withdrawe,  
Se frowardly, as it were by disdeyne,  
Ye moste approche unto my mortale lawe  
It to contraire it were but in veyne.*





MPORTUNA mors  
mille modis quo-  
tidie miseros ho-  
mines rapit; hunc  
necat febribus,

hunc opprimit doloribus, hunc con-  
sumit fame, illum siti extinguit,  
hunc suffocat aquis, illum interi-  
mit laqueo, illum perimit flammis,  
hunc trucidat ferro, illum veneno  
corrumpit, alterum repentino ter-  
rore miseram vitam finire com-  
pellit.

S. AUGUSTINUS.

*Right nowe, sir prince, for alle your highnesse,  
The pompe of wordely honoure ye shalle lete;  
Who moste haboundeth here in gret richesse,  
Shalle bere with hym but a single shete.*

A 2





ATHERINA virgo  
cum decollata  
fuisset, de ejus  
corpore lac ema-  
navit. Angeli au-

tem corpus ejus accipientes ab illo  
loco ad montem Sinay itinere plus  
quam viginti deduxerunt, et ibi-  
dem honorifice sepelierunt. Ex  
cujus ossibus indesinenter oleum  
emanat, quod cunctorum debi-  
lium membra sanat. Passa est sub  
Maxentio sive Maximiano tyranno.

JACOBUS DE VORAGINE.

*Ye that so longe worshipec and renoun  
Have had aminges ladies and barons,  
Now moste ye from your highnesse come adoun,  
Forgettyng youre trompettes and clarions.*



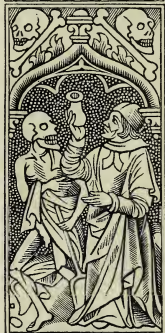


AUDANS invocabo  
Dominum et ab  
inimicis meis sal-  
vus ero. Circum-  
dederunt me do-

lores mortis, et torrentes iniqui-  
tatis conturbaverunt me. Dolores  
infernī circumdederunt me; præ-  
occupaverunt me laquei mortis.

PSALM. XVII.

*Farwelle, my tythes, farwelle, myne offe-  
[rynge;  
I most go compte in ordre by and by,  
And for my shepe make a juste reckonyng;  
Whom God acquiteth, I hold hym happy.*





ors nihil aliud est  
quam peregrina-  
tionis terminus,  
finis miseriae, la-  
borum meta, exi-  
lii limes, janua patriae, nativitas  
vitae, principium beatitudinis, pri-  
mitiae primitiorum.

PETRUS BLESSENSIS.

*Maister of phisike, werketh not in veyne;  
Ayenste my mygth your skylle may not endure,  
For alle your crafte and study of medycine,  
Leche though ye be, youre self ye can not cure.*



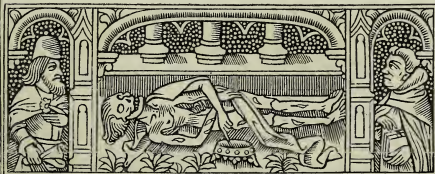


ULLIUS miseretur  
mors, nulli com-  
patitur, omnibus  
æquatur, inspe-  
rata venit, nulli

parcit, corpus et animam separat,  
finis est laborum et ultima linea  
rerum.

HUGO A SANCTO VICTORE.

*Thou usurer, loke up here at my calle,  
Unto wynninge that setteste alle thy peyne;  
A perilouse stroke shal make the lese alle;  
Thy gredy cheste thou filleste alle in veyne.*





MISER homo, quocumque te verteris, incerta omnia, sola mors certa. Pauper es,

incertum est an ditiescas. Indoctus, incertum est an erudiaris. Imbecillis, incertum est an conualescas. Natus es; certum est quia morieris, et in hoc ipso, quia mors certa est, dies mortis incertus est, itaque hæc incerta.

S. AUGUSTINUS SUPER PSAL.



*Sir corduler, to you myn hond is raught  
To this daunce you to conveye and lede,  
Which in your prechynge have ful ofte taught  
How I am most gastfulle for to drede.*





ER unum homi-  
nem quemadmo-  
dum in mundum  
introivit ac per  
peccatum mors,

et sic in omnes homines mors  
pervasis quatenus omnes pecca-  
verunt. Imo regnavit mors in eos  
qui non peccaverant ad similitu-  
dinem transgressionis Adam, qui  
typum gerit illius futuri.

PAULUS AD ROM. V.

*Ye have assayled castelle and fortresse,  
And thynke youre self strenger than Charle-  
[mayne ;  
But malgré alle youre worldely prouesse,  
With us to daince I shalle you nowe cons-  
[trayne.*



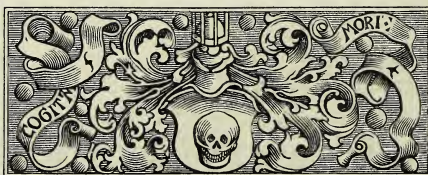


UOTIDIE morimur;  
quotidie enim de-  
mitur aliqua pars  
vitæ, et, tunc quo-  
que cum cresci-

mus, vita decrescit; infantiam  
amisimus, deinde pueritiam, dein-  
de adolescentiam; usque ad hes-  
ternum quidquid transiit temporis  
periit; hunc ipsum, quem agimus,  
diem cum morte dividimus.

SENECA, EPIST. 24.

*Though ye be tendre and born of gentille  
[blode,  
Unto this daunce I moste be your gyde;  
Leveth your vayle, your wymple and your hode,  
And, while ye lyve, for your soule provyde.*





EMEDIUM mors est,  
studiorum et cu-  
rarum ad vitam  
pertinentium va-  
cuitas. Mori non  
est malum, sed male mori pessi-  
mum.

S. JOANNES CHRYSOSTOMUS.

*Thou that hast lyved ful ofte in jolyfte,  
Come forthe, sir fole, wyth baubel and wyth  
[cappe;  
For no man maye escape his destyne;  
But, wyse or fole, deth muste be thyne happe.*

A 3



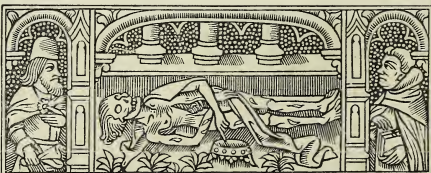


UBITÆ necessitati  
mortis vana spes  
non præjudicat æ-  
tatis; quippe quæ  
infantes, pueros,  
adolescentes pari ut senes sorte  
præcipit.

JOANNES CASS



*O thou that many a man hast allured,  
And made hym waste hys youthe in false ple-  
[saunce,  
Though in youre beauté ye ben moche assured,  
Yit shalle ye atte laste joyne my daunce.*





ENEAMUS nullum  
esse malum quod  
sit a natura da-  
tum hominibus,  
intelligamusque,  
si mors malum sit, esse malum  
sempiternum; nam vitæ miseræ  
non finis esse videtur. Mors si est  
misera, finis nullus esse potest.

M. TULLIUS CICERO.

*Wel ofte thou in fulle bole and kan  
Hast swynked for to drynke and to swylle;  
Nowe here, wyth thyne hewe pale et van,  
Thou shalt daunce maugré thy wylle.*





BICUMQUE desines,  
si bene desinis,  
sed et fortiter de-  
sinendum. Non  
est res magna vi-

vere, omnes servi tui vivunt,  
omnia animalia, sed magnum est  
honeste mori, prudenter, fortiter.

SENECA.



*Allas! Syre galaunte, nowe most thou saunz*

[socoure

*Abate thy veyne glorie and thy pryde,  
And leve byhynde al worldely honoure,  
For agenst dethe no thyng may abide.*





LNERA mea ecce  
 non abscondo;  
 medicus es; æger  
 sum. — Mors, si-  
 cut nec sibi a  
 quoquam sponte, nec cuiquam  
 sponte inferenda est, ita, Deo  
 jubente, recusanda non est, cujus  
 institutione quocumque tempore  
 obeunda est.

S. AUGUSTINUS.

*Thou that hast lyved longe in wyldernesse,  
 Must nowe take leve of thyne ermytage ;  
 For yche man knowethe welle this sentence,  
 That in this lyfe is no sure heritage.*



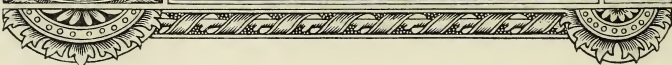


ANTHIPPÆ UXORI  
Socrates, cum for-  
ti animo et con-  
stanti vultu potio-  
nem veneni e ma-

nu carnificis accepisset, admoto  
jam labris poculo, inter fletum et  
lamentationem vociferanti inno-  
centem eum perimi : « Quid ergo?  
inquit. Nocenti mihi satius esse  
duxisti? » O immensam illam sa-  
pientiam quæ ne in ipso quidem  
vitæ excessu oblivisci sui potuit!

VALERIUS MAXIMUS.

*Al youre passetyme has ben to shaken the  
[dyce;  
But throwe no more, for nowe it is youre  
[chaunce,  
Maugré youre grete othes and wordes nyce,  
To folowe me bothe in the dedely daunce.*





SAIAS filius Amos  
propheta intro-  
ivit ad Ezechiam  
ægrotantem us-  
que ad mortem

et dixit ei : « Dispone domui tuæ,  
quia morieris tu et non vives. »  
Et dixit Ezechias : « Non videbo  
Dominum Deum in terra viven-  
tium. Generatio mea ablata est et  
convoluta est a me, sicut taber-  
naculum pastorum. Præcissa ve-  
lut a texente anima mea ; dum  
adhuc ordirer, incudit me. »

YSAIAS.

*Lytel enfaunt, that were but late borne,  
Schaped in this worlde to have no plesaunce,  
Thou moste wyth othere that are gone to forne  
Be led in haste by fatal ordynance.*





ALPHABETI ultima  
littera est, ut dies  
mortis ultimus vi-  
tæ. Ideo prima  
et ultima Græco-

rum, A atque Ω, omnis cursus  
vitæ comprehensus significandus-  
que præbetur.



*Remember alle there is no better victorie  
In this lyfe here than sle synne at leste,  
Thanne shalle ye regne in Paradys with glorie;  
Happy is he in hevene that makethe his feste.*





OUR TERM OF LIFE DEPENDS NOT ON OUR  
DEED.  
BEFORE OUR BIRTH OUR FUNERAL WAS  
DECREED;  
NOR AW'D BY FORESIGHT, NOR MISLED BY  
CHANCE,  
IMPERIOUS DEATH DIRECTS THE EBON'S  
LANCE,  
PEOPLES GREAT HENRY'S TUMBS, AND LEADS  
UP HOLBEIN'S DANCE.

(PRIOR.)





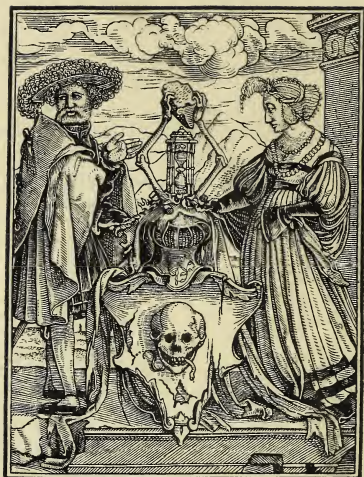
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